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THE JEWS IN SOUTHERN ITALY.

IN an open courtyard of the Museum at Taranto (the *Tápas* of the Greeks and the *Tarentum* of the Romans) are some interesting Jewish tombstones of which the following are transcriptions:—

A.

קובר
יוסף
בר יוסף

Joseph son of Joseph is buried (here).

The stone with this inscription had been placed upside down in the Museum.

B.

פה ינוח אשת
לאון בן 
דויד מן
מילו

Here lies the wife of Leon son of David from Melos (?).

פה ינוח is a grammatical error for תנווח. The emblem of the shield of David preceding the name דויד is interesting. מילו can hardly be Milan, the ancient name for which was *Mediolanum*. It may possibly be the island of *Melos*.

C.

פה ינוח שבתיי בן
לאון מבן שש
עשרה שנה
יהי שלום על
מנוחתו

Here lies Sabbattai son of Leon aged sixteen years. Peace be upon his rest.

There are several other such inscriptions, some commencing with the words זכרון צדיק *the memorial of a righteous man.*

Some stones have inscriptions in Latin as well as in Hebrew, the Latin inscription being as a rule on one of the four sides and the Hebrew on another. For example:—

D.

פה ינוח בזיכרון טוב
שמואל בן סילנו עם
יחזקאל אחי אביו שחיה
ארבעים ושתים שנה יהי
שלום על מנוחתם

HIC · RECQVIESCIT ·

SAMOEL · FIL · SIL ·

* * *

Here lies in good remembrance Samuel son of Silanus. with Ezechiel his father's brother, who lived forty-two years. Peace be upon their rest!

Ascoli has already edited this inscription, or rather a portion of it. (*Iscrizioni*, Turin, 1880.)

Besides these there are some epitaphs in Greek, e. g. :—

E.

ΕΝΘΑ ΚΑΤΑ
ΚΗΤΕ ΗΛΙΑC
ΥΙΟC ΙΑΑ * * *

ἐνθα κατάκειται Ἡλίας υἱὸς Ἰαα[κώβ]. *Here lies Elijah son of Jacob (?)*.

F.

ΕΝΘΑ ΚΑΤΑ
ΚΗΤΕ ΛΑΒΔ
ΑΤΟΝ ΥΙΟC ΑΖ
ΑΡΙΑ ΚΑΙ COCA
ΝΑ ΕΝ ΕΡΙΝΗ
ΚΥΜΙCΙC ΑΥΤΙC

ἐνθα κατέκειται Λαυδάτου υἱὸς Ἀζαρία, καὶ Σόσανα· ἐν εἰρήνῃ κοίμησις αὐτοῖς. *Here lies Laudatus' son Azaria, also Susanna; may their rest be in peace!*

ΛΑΥΔΑΤΟΥ is no doubt the genitive of ΛΑΥΔΑΤΟΣ = *laudatus*, 'praised'; possibly, as Rabbi Coha of Corfu has suggested, it may be an ungrammatical equivalent for the Hebrew name לָאֵל. COCANA is not the only spelling of the name שִׁשְׁנָה; in Alexandria I found a Jewish tombstone with a Greek inscription in which the name occurs spelt Σούσανα. The last two lines are a rendering of the common Hebrew prayer יְהִי שְׁלוֹם עַל מְנוּחֵתָם. It will be seen that the spelling of these two inscriptions differs considerably from that of classical Greek; it is clearly phonetic and proves that at the time from which they date the pronunciation of Greek had undergone considerable modifications in the direction of modern Hellenic.

So far as I can find, none of these inscriptions, with the exception of D, have been edited before. With regard to the character of the Hebrew writing, a distinct and fairly uniform style runs through all of them; the shape of the letters כ (א), ז (ב), ט (ג), ך (ד) is remarkable. In fact the open side of the letter ט of itself is sufficient to furnish a "terminus ad quem" as to the date of these tombstones, for it is not met with elsewhere after the eleventh century; on the other hand it occurs as early as the first century after Christ. A striking point in the inscriptions is their similarity with those discovered in 1853 in the catacombs of Venosa¹. In the first place the Hebrew handwriting of the two shows a distinct resemblance, and secondly the same combination of Hebrew with Latin and of Hebrew with Greek is there met with. For instance:—

ΩΔΕ ΚΙΤΕ ΑΣΕΛΛΑ

&c.

ש[לום]

Here again we find *κέιται* phonetically spelt *κτε*. The un-Jewish name *Asella* has its parallels in others of the Venosa inscriptions, as for example *Faustinus*, *Pretiosa*; and it strengthens the conjecture made above that סִילָנוּ and SIL· in inscription D stand for *Silanus*.

One naturally turns to the Venosa inscriptions in order to obtain a clue to the solution of the interesting question of the date of our

¹ Ascoli, *Iscrizioni*.

tombstones. Hirschfeld ascribes the former to the fifth or sixth century A.D., whilst de Angelis and Smith, judging from the character of the Greek and Latin letters, come to the conclusion that they cannot be older than the third nor later than the sixth century. It is interesting also to compare our inscriptions with the tombstones discovered in the cemeteries of Rome, which are believed to belong in the main to the third and fourth centuries¹. Of these the oldest are in Greek. The following is an example²:—

[EN]ΘΑΔΕ ΚΙΤΕ CYNΗΛΙΚΗ
ΔΟΥΓΑΤΗΡ ΟΥΡCΑΚΙΟΥ
ΕΝ ΕΙΡΙΝΙ ΚΥΜΙCΙC ΑΥΤΗC

It is remarkable that the word for "lies" is in the Roman inscriptions sometimes correctly spelt *κείραι* and sometimes *κείτε*, *κίτε* and even *χείραι*, but never as at Taranto *κητε*. Some light no doubt can be thrown from this quarter upon the date of the Taranto tombstones. But internal evidence is forthcoming from the latter themselves. I showed a squeeze of the Greek inscription F to Professor Staïs, Director of the National Museum at Athens, and he stated without hesitation that the writing was of the third century A.D.

It appears then that at this early date a Jewish community and a Jewish cemetery existed at Tarentum. Tarentum was one of the Apulian communities, and Zunz mentions it as such³ together with Trani, Bari, Otranto, Lecce, Siponto, and Melfi. In Bari there is still to be found a Via Sinagoga, but of the Synagogue there are now no remains. Zunz does not mention Brindisi, but evidently Jews once lived there in some numbers, for some old Jewish tombstones have been discovered there and there is still a Via Iudecca in the town.

It is an interesting fact that numbers of Italian Jews emigrated to Corfu when Ferdinand and Isabelle exiled them from the kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

Corfu was then under Venetian rule. Zunz, though he mentions the fact that during the sixteenth century Apulian and Calabrian fugitives founded synagogues in Arta, Valona, Salonica, Constantinople and other places in Turkey, omits all reference to Corfu. Even at the present day the Jews of Corfu are divided as to *Minhag* and even as to language into Greeks and Apulians ("Pugliesi"), as the

¹ Vogelstein-Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom*, p. 55.

² Garrucci, *Cimitero degli antichi Ebrei*, p. 54.

³ *Ritus des synagogalen Gottesdienstes*, p. 78.

Italian section is called. The latter is now the more important of the two communities, and its members, as indeed many other Corfiotes, speak a bastard Italian called "Pugliese," representing the Apulian dialect of the fugitives from Italy.

It is certainly remarkable that notwithstanding the complete religious toleration which Jews now enjoy in Italy, hardly any have as yet found their way back again to its southern provinces.

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